



## Spotlight on PSAC and Aboriginal workers

When PSAC holds its first Aboriginal Peoples' conference in Winnipeg this month, it will represent a historic moment for the union. Members and activists will unite under the theme of "MAAWANGITEENG: Where the Journey Begins!" This represents the culmination of over 30 years of PSAC working with First Nations, Inuit and Métis workers to improve their workplaces and communities. This month's issue of *Union Update* focuses on the achievements of PSAC's National Aboriginal, Inuit, and Métis (NAIM) Network.



### What is NAIM?

NAIM is PSAC's National Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis Network. Made up of Aboriginal union members from coast-to-coast-to-coast, NAIM provides a unified voice for PSAC's First Nations, Inuit and Métis members and encourages Aboriginal Peoples to get involved in all aspects of the union and advance their rights in the broader community.

Formed in 2003, the NAIM Network guides PSAC's work with Aboriginal communities and provides the union with direction on the priorities of Aboriginal members. The network is guided by the NAIM Circle, which is made up of the two elected Aboriginal representatives on PSAC's Equal Opportunities Committee (EOC); 14 regional representatives who have self-identified as Aboriginal and two co-chairs from the Alliance Executive Committee appointed by the National President.

### What does NAIM do?

The NAIM network contributes to PSAC in many ways, including:

- Exploring and developing terminology that is inclusive

and respectful of all Aboriginal workers.

- **Reaching out** to PSAC's First Nations, Inuit and Métis members.
- **Communicating** with Aboriginal members using electronic and print media.
- **Creating opportunities** for Aboriginal members to be well-represented within the union and to advance resolutions through PSAC's political processes.



- **Educating** our members, our union and society at large about the needs and rights of Aboriginal Peoples.
- **Mobilizing** PSAC members to take action on workplace and broader political issues that are important to Aboriginal Peoples.
- **Advancing Aboriginal rights** by fighting racism and discrimination in our workplaces, in our union and in society at large.



## What has NAIM achieved?

- The network has recruited more than 270 PSAC members.
- NAIM Circle members have undertaken outreach, setting up booths at regional and national union events, including the 2006 PSAC National Triennial Convention.
- From March 31 to April 2, 2008, NAIM Circle member Elijah Kaerner and NAIM Co-Chair Patty Ducharme facilitated a community consultation with Inuit members in Iqaluit, Nunavut. It was an opportunity for PSAC to reach out to Inuit members, to promote the NAIM Network and to encourage Inuit workers to attend the PSAC Aboriginal Peoples' Conference.
- In partnership with the Canadian Labour Congress, PSAC produced and distributed promotional material for National Aboriginal Solidarity Day on June 21 and annually posts a statement on the national PSAC website on National Aboriginal Solidarity Day.
- Participants in the PSAC's Leadership Development Program, NAIM Circle members have taken the opportunity to connect with activists from all parts of the union.
- With delegate status at regional conventions, NAIM Circle members now have a voice and a vote on decisions that affect the future of their regions.
- With the assistance of PSAC's education program, The NAIM Circle developed a course entitled "Our Communities,



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*they are also deeply involved in local political and social struggles.*

Our Union, Our Rights: an introduction to the PSAC for Aboriginal Members," which was delivered to over 100 members in every region in 2007 and 2008.

- The NAIM Circle moved PSAC to endorse the Assembly of First Nations' Make Poverty History Campaign (2007) and the First Nations' Day of Action (June 2007 and May 2008).

### Standing in solidarity

In addition to the work that NAIM members do to strengthen the presence of Aboriginal workers within PSAC, they are also deeply involved in local political and social struggles. They have helped our union stand in solidarity with First Nations people who are fighting to get the federal

government to recognize land claims and to make redress for the grave injustices committed against them.

The NAIM Circle marshalled PSAC's support for the struggles of the Ardoch Algonquin Nation in Eastern Ontario and the Kitchenumahkoosib Inninuwig (KI) First Nation in Northern Ontario, and for First Nations leaders jailed in April 2008. In each of these cases, NAIM members argued for the rights of the protesters to stand up against the violations of First Nations communities' fundamental rights to their land and water.

In addition to supporting the struggle over land claims, NAIM members counselled PSAC to take action to support Sharon McIvor, a First Nations woman from B.C. who is pursuing an important legal

challenge against engrained sex discrimination in the *Indian Act*. Mclvor is challenging the preferential treatment given to males and those whose Indian status is traced from male

ancestors. While she won at the B.C. Supreme Court, the federal government is appealing the decision. PSAC has provided financial support to Sharon Mclvor and has mobilized our membership

and the support of other unions. A resolution to support Sharon Mclvor submitted to the Canadian Labour Congress Convention was adopted unanimously.

## Activist Spotlight: Alisha Bigelow

Alisha Bigelow is passionate about standing up for Aboriginal rights, both on the job, and in the broader community. A 10-year employee of the Canada Revenue Agency, Alisha is active as the Prairies female representative in the NAIM Circle. She took a few minutes out of her busy day to talk about what motivates her to stay involved with her union and with the Aboriginal community.

### What led you to get involved in PSAC's NAIM network?

I originally got involved in the union through my local, the Union of Taxation Employees (UTE), through a youth initiative and a conference that was held in Ottawa a few years ago. Shortly thereafter I was asked to be our local's secretary and eventually became more trained and familiar with the union structure.

I find it challenging and exciting to be a part of the NAIM Circle as we come from all over Canada and our cultures are so different! One of our members from Hall Beach, Nunavut always reminds me that there are certainly no teepees in the North. At a recent NAIM meeting, I invited other members to sample bannock burgers in my hotel room, which was a first for many.

### What are some of the challenges that the NAIM Network faces?

Communication across vast regions is very difficult. This is particularly a problem in Nunuvut. Radios come in handy when you are moving information from one

community to the next. Internet is not always accessible or available – a problem that we rarely encounter in cities.

### What are some of the Aboriginal issues that you would like to see the labour movement get more involved in?

In addition to supporting land claims, I am specifically concerned about the lack of health care, housing and clean water for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. There are a disproportionate number of Aboriginal children in the foster care system, and this is directly related to a lack of child care choices and widespread child poverty. Aboriginal people complain of being mistreated by police officers, and are frustrated that Missing Person notices aren't released or distributed in a timely fashion to the public or the media. All of this, in addition to the ongoing challenge of ensuring employment equity in workplaces.

### Why is your union and community activism so important to you?

I am from White Bear First Nation in Saskatchewan. I am aware of the cycle of poverty that exists on First Nations reserves and I want it to stop.

We have to keep at our Members of Parliament MPs to not only address this issue but to also take responsibility for ensuring Aboriginal human rights. I believe NAIM can help make a difference for our future.



Dear Prime Minister,  
Sometimes sorry isn't enough.

**Stand up for  
Aboriginal  
human  
rights  
today.**



*Dear Prime Minister,*

**Sometimes sorry isn't enough.**

**Here are four things you can do to stand up for  
Aboriginal human rights:**

- Make Aboriginal Poverty History - start by honouring the commitments made in the Kelowna Accord.
- Fix the water crisis in First Nations' communities.
- Sign the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Drop the appeal against Sharon McIvor – end gender discrimination against First Nations' women and their families.

**Without action, the federal government's apology  
to residential school survivors rings hollow.**

Strong, vibrant, healthy and prosperous Aboriginal communities make for a better and more equitable country. What we need is the political will to make it happen.

Visit [psac-afpc.com](http://psac-afpc.com), for more information on the issues referred to above.

*Sincerely,*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_



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